

socialist standard

November 2016
Vol. 115 No. 1345
£1.50

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

American Beauty

The US Presidential Elections



Aberfan
page 12



socialist standard

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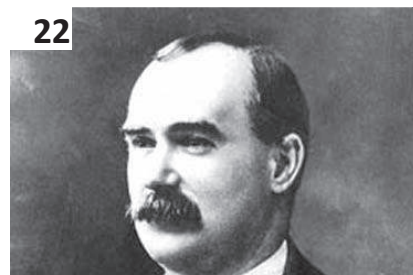
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Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism.

Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.



We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English. The more of you who join the Socialist

Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

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Tweedledum and Tweedledummer

ON 8 November, American workers will be casting their votes for the next US President. Aside from the minor candidates, Jill Stein of the Green Party and Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party, the contest is between Donald Trump, the Republican Party's Frankenstein Monster, and Hillary Clinton, the devotee of US corporations and Wall Street.

Donald Trump, the billionaire political conman who poses as the workers' champion, has been preying on the anger, insecurities and, in some cases, the desperation of American workers, many of whom are still suffering from the effects of the 2008 financial crash. He claims he will bring jobs back to the US and scapegoats immigrant and Muslim workers for America's social and economic ills. He appeals to the more conservative voters by supporting gun ownership and opposing abortion. With the release of a video produced in 2005, which reveals Trump boasting that his celebrity status allows him to grope any woman he wants, many high ranking Republicans have dumped him. Further allegations by women, who have come forward to accuse him of sexual assault, have added

to the discomfort of the Republicans.

Many in the Republican Party hierarchy have never favoured his candidacy, regarding him as an aberration. Yet, his populist style of politics has, in some form or other, been pursued by Republican and Democrat politicians in the past. He follows in the footsteps of Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan and George W Bush among others.

Hillary Clinton beat Bernie Sanders, the so called 'Democratic Socialist' from Vermont, to become the first woman Presidential nominee. She has positioned herself as the progressive candidate supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights and is pro abortion and is in favour of gun control. As a New York Senator, she voted for the Iraq War. However, her candidacy has been dogged by question marks over her use of a private email server when she was Secretary of State and controversies over foreign donations to the Clinton Foundation. Despite this, her candidacy has received endorsements from high ranking members of the political and corporate establishments, including many Republicans. Her campaign has received

donations from Wall Street interests.

Despite the animosity between Trump and Clinton that has been revealed in the election rallies and TV debates, there is one fundamental issue in which they both agree and that is in the need to support US capitalism. Whoever wins, the US government will continue to manage capitalism as before, promoting the interests of the US capitalist class at home and abroad. American workers will continue to work for their bosses, and if a profit cannot be made, then unemployment looms. Workers will still be sent to fight wars on behalf of the capitalist class. Sadly for the American working class, it will be business as usual when the new President takes office in January 2017.

Yet it need not be this way. American workers have another choice. They can unite with workers worldwide to gain political power and wrest control of the Earth's resources from the capitalist class and convert them from private property used for the production of profit to the common heritage of all humankind.

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Scenes Deleted From The Jungle Book

DID YOU know that cheetahs can't roar scarily like lions, they mostly purr prettily like kittens? Or that they are generally good-natured and easy to tame, unlike other big cats? You probably know that the cubs are incredibly cutesy-cute. What you probably don't know is that these reasons, taken together, are helping to drive the fastest animal on Earth to its extinction.

Why? Because as well as having to deal with low birth rates in the wild due to shrinking habitat combined with around 70 percent cub mortality thanks to lions and hyenas, the cheetah has to face a rather less natural form of predation. Humans want them as pets. But not pets to look after properly, of course. Trophy pets, costing up to \$10,000 each on the black market, to dress up in stupid outfits so that their rich, narcissistic owners can impress their shallow and supercilious friends. So poachers box up whole litters of wild cubs in packing crates, bundle them onto trucks and then container ships, and then lift out whatever has survived at the other end from the heap of starved and dehydrated corpses (BBC Online, 23 September: <http://tiny.cc/s7b2fy>). Most of the 15 percent of furry little cuties which survive transit rarely make it past their first year as pets anyway because their rich owners have no clue or care about diet or exercise, and are entirely unconcerned about keeping an animal indoors which normally has a 500 square mile backyard to run around in. And if by a miracle they do survive this domestic incarceration, they get too big to feed and the adoring owners promptly dump them in back alleys to starve.

To see who these pet owners are, here's a sample of the *Daily Mail* in all its fawning glory, gushing over a pair of South African owners and without a single word of criticism (actually, here's a link instead: <http://tiny.cc/o0b2fy> - we don't want to make *Socialist Standard* readers feel sick by inserting *Daily Mail* text here). Here is the same paper simpering over Mr Ultra-Rich Humaid AlBuQaish ('it is not entirely clear what AlBuQaish does for a living') as he flaunts for his 850,000 Instagram followers his menagerie including a lion, a cheetah, a tiger, several chimps and some marmosets, together with an unidentified woman in a bikini and a Ferrari (<http://tiny.cc/lzd2fy>).

It's one thing, you might argue, to farm animals for their meat, though



Mother and young rhino killed for their horns, South Africa. The wild rhino population has collapsed by 96 percent since 1970, due to poaching.

many would question whether even this is necessary. As humans we are inevitably going to put humans first, and socialists are no different. If animal testing of important medicines is deemed necessary, we are not going to argue that it should not be done, because that would unconsciously put the welfare of animals above that of humans. Indeed there is something rather peculiar about humans and their double-standards towards animals, on the one hand billing and cooing over chicks or lambs or bunny rabbits and then eating them in pies, or keeping pet moggies out of a 'love for animals' while overlooking the massacre of wildlife these same moggies cause on a daily basis. It's estimated, for example, that domestic cats kill around 14 billion small mammals and birds every year in the USA, while in Australia there is serious talk of imposing cat curfews and outdoor enclosed 'catios' to keep the destruction to within sustainable limits (*New Scientist*, 8 October).

Even so, it is surely beyond any reasonable person to defend the wholesale slaughter of African large animals for the ivory or bushmeat trade, or the exotic pet business, especially when this is a trade indulged in largely by and for the amusement of the rich alone. It's not as if we can really blame the individual poachers either. Faced with poverty themselves, what else are they going to do? And can you even blame individual states, if it comes to that? Swaziland caused a huge row recently at the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species by arguing that, in order to finance anti-poaching measures, they needed to sell off some of their stock of rhino horn (*New Scientist*, 1

October). Rhino horn is hugely valuable in Asian markets for quack remedies, and as rhinos approach total extinction in the wild Asian buyers are keen to stock up in advance, thus driving the price further up. The naysayers are adamant that a legitimate market in rhino horn, however limited, will be a disaster for rhinos. They're probably right too. When a limited sale of stockpiled elephant tusks was restarted in 1997, elephant poaching went stratospheric.

Cynics talk about capitalism as 'the law of the jungle' but in fact it's much more vicious and destructive than any law of the jungle, for animals as well as humans. It's a mindless profit-machine, without care or conscience, that like some giant combine harvester rages across the world shredding everything in its path, whether human, animal or natural resource. Where it makes wealth, the rich use it as their plaything. Where it makes a desert, they call it good business practice.

But the rich ought to beware, because one of these days the overwhelming majority of helpless and enslaved workers are going to discover something very important. Whether they are mostly concerned for themselves or their fellows, or else for whales or cheetahs or the environment, or for ideas of justice and human dignity or their children's ultimate welfare, workers are going to discover that they have something uniquely in common, which is that they don't need to be slaves and that they are not helpless at all. And then, just like those humiliated pets dressed up in stupid clothes with stupid names in the service of an even greater stupidity, they are going to discover that they have claws too.

PJS

A workers' declaration

Dear Editors

I hope one day there is a workers' declaration that goes something like this: We the workers of the world declare all the raw-materials of Earth, the means of production and distribution, the means to a good life, to be ours.

The world is no longer owned by the non-producing class. The Earth no longer belongs to the one percent. Today the world belongs to all the human race. The fruits of the labours we the producers of goods produce are ours.

We the workers understand that capitalism doesn't work for us. And all the reforms in the world are not going to make it work for us.

We the producing class, the workers of the world, the 99 percent, understand a World Without Money is the system that is best for us. And for all the animals, the oceans, the atmosphere, the earth.

We are now the owners of planet Earth. We are the masters of this world.

So much of our labour yesterday was wasted. We put a stop to that nonsense—in a non violent, peaceful, radical, intelligent way. We will never again waste our raw-materials. No more will we waste our labour, our lives, our time, our genius, our industry, our potential, our love.

In everything we produce for ourselves we will produce nothing but what our best endeavours can produce. Everyone of us will have the means to enjoy a good life.

We the workers of the world with the right ideas have conquered the capitalist system.

We have dismantled and abolished capitalism. And have established a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic

control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the best interest of the human race.

We the workers of the world build every building. Lay every railway track. Bake every pie. This world is ours by right. Because we make it.

We the workers of the world hereby declare that from this day forth our labour will turn the raw materials of Earth into the things we need and want for a civilized system of society. For all of us to enjoy. And our children to enjoy. And their children. And their children. Until Earth's raw-materials—which belong to humankind—can sustain humankind no more. And we live on Earth no more.

Until that day comes, we, the workers of the world will make Earth if not paradise then as near as makes no difference.

LEE HEATH, Manchester.

More Brexit

Dear Editors

Is your socialist idea different from that horrible globalisation Britain has courageously escaped from – can you imagine thousands and thousands of Brits turning up in, say, Poland, wanting jobs, housing, schooling, medical care, etc? Don't you think they would say, how big do you think this country is . . . ? You could fit Britain into one US State.

Have you read *America Rules* by Tom Hana? Then let me know if you think the EU has been good for any of the citizens of the 28 member states. I said citizens, not politicians. They are a different species.

Ireland is a member, and this numpty lot have refused a tax refund! I'd still like to know how the EU can make Ireland

charge its citizens for water when they levied it on the car tax in 2003. They must not have told the EU.

I think a good percentage of Out voters did so instinctively. They knew it wasn't fair.

Mrs L. McKenna, Co Donegal, Eire.

Reply: First of all, let's be clear. The Socialist Party is opposed to all forms of capitalism whether it is organised according to a free enterprise or state capitalist model, whether it is nationally or globally structured or whether it is administered by left wing or right wing governments. But socialism will be a global society (of course with as much local devolution as people want) where people will be free to move from one part of the planet to another. This is clearly incompatible with capitalism but will be possible under socialism.

We have not read the book you mention although we tried to search for it on the internet. Whether the EU has been good for the citizens of the member states is obviously a matter of opinion. Europhiles in each country can point to many positives, Eurosceptics can do the opposite. It's like having an argument as to which of Fianna Fail or Fine Gael in Ireland or the Conservative or Labour parties in Britain is better. In that sense it's a political debate within capitalism and while we understand the importance such issues have to some people, we don't adjudicate on these matters. The issues at stake – if they are really issues at all – are tiny.

Taxation is a contentious issue in most countries; what is taxed and who is taxed and who gets to decide these things and who enforces taxation. In many countries there is anger about the very low effective taxation rate levied on multinational companies who can use both their economic clout and employ legal trickery to get away with derisory levels of payments. Also, as in the case of water charges in Ireland, nobody likes fresh taxation especially on such a basic human resource such as drinkable water. However, most of these controversies miss the point about the fundamental nature of taxation within capitalism; that ultimately it is a charge on capital, and some sections of the owners of capital (the capitalist class) are keen to transfer the burden to other sections.

Only when we collectively realize that what are presented as contentious issues such as immigration, taxation, etc. are not the real defining issues of our lives, can we plan a much better society – Editorial Committee.

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THE INDEPENDENT

How to oppose religion

THE CHRISTIAN and the socialist put two radically different messages to workers. One is that this life 'down here' is only important as a preparation for the next life after death which, depending on whether or not you adhered to the precepts of Christianity, would either be eternal bliss or eternal hell-fire. The other is that this was the only life we are going to have and that workers should therefore concentrate on making it the best possible; which can only, be lastingly done on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living. This – socialism – is what workers should be striving for rather than preparing themselves for some non-existent future life.

There are two ways of opposing religion. One is to refute it as untrue, to show that there are no rational grounds, because there is no convincing evidence, for believing either in the persistence of life after death or in the existence of supernatural beings. This is the approach of the secularists and freethinkers and of course what they say is true, but this leaves the impression that religion is merely an erroneous belief. It leads to concentrating on refuting religious beliefs as such in a purely ideological battle while leaving everything else, including class society and capitalist relations of production, unchanged.

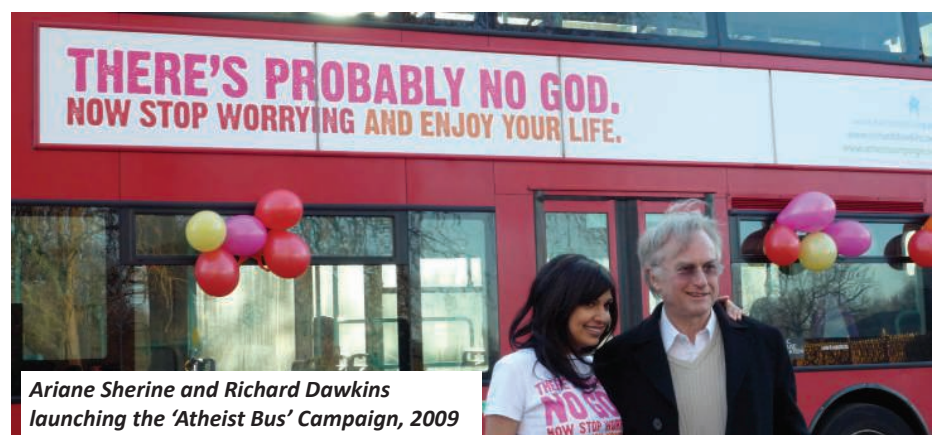
The second way to oppose religion is to explain its origins, development and role in materialist terms as an ideological product of the changing material economic and social conditions under which people have lived. This approach reveals religion to be a reflection of people's lack of control over the conditions governing the production of their material means of survival and that it survives precisely because people lack this control.

On this analysis, opposition to religion cannot be separated from opposition to the economic and social conditions that give rise to it. Religion won't disappear simply because secularists and freethinkers, or for that matter socialists, refute it as untrue. It will only disappear when people are in a position to control the production of their means of life. This requires the end of the class ownership of

the means of production and the end of production for the market with a view to profit and their replacement by common ownership and production directly and exclusively for use.

In other words, religion cannot disappear until the conditions of which it is an ideological reflection disappear. Criticism of religion leads, or ought logically to lead, to criticism of society. As Marx put it in the famous passage in the Introduction to his 1844 *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*:

'Religion is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.'



The sinking pound

'HARD BREXIT fears push sterling to a fresh low' read the headline in the *Times* (7 October) reporting that the pound had fallen to its lowest level against the dollar for 31 years. Others are suggesting that it could eventually fall, ironically, to £1 = 1 Euro.

Until 1973 most of the world's currencies were tied to a fixed rate with the US dollar and so also to each other. If a country wanted to change this it had to get the agreement of the IMF. Governments tried to avoid such a formal devaluation as this was regarded as a recognition that they could not control the part of the capitalist economy they presided over as they had claimed in order to get elected.

Such devaluations reflected a situation where a country's exports were doing badly, generally because their prices were uncompetitive due to a higher than average rate of inflation. This resulted in more capitalist firms wanting to sell the country's currency than to buy it (to pay for its exports). Governments tried to

hold the fixed rate by using their reserves of other currencies to buy their own currency. When this couldn't be kept up, they had no alternative but to seek the permission of the IMF to devalue, ie, to lower its exchange rate with the US dollar and so with other currencies too.

When the Labour government was forced to devalue the pound in November 1967 the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, famously declared that 'it does not mean that the pound here in Britain, in your pocket or your purse or in the bank, has been devalued.'

This was technically true but disingenuous as, while a pound would still buy a pound's worth of goods in Britain, one effect of devaluation is to raise the price of imported goods. As many of these are consumer goods or enter into their production, the effect is that 'the pound in your pocket' will eventually come to buy less than before the devaluation.

Nowadays, with floating exchange rates, governments don't need to formally change the exchange rate of their currency. They can just let market forces decide what the exchange rate is by the demand for it. Because a falling exchange rate increases the price of imported goods governments do not

necessarily always want this, so they still intervene in the currency market to try to keep the rate from falling.

On the other hand, when they want to try to increase exports, they let it fall. In fact, now that under WTO rules tariffs can't be used as a weapon of economic competition, letting a country's exchange rate fall has become a replacement. The euro, which in effect established a fixed rate of exchange between the currencies of the member-countries all renamed "euro", is in part an attempt to prevent this kind of economic competition. One reason Britain stayed out was to be able to continue to use this weapon.

The current fall in the value of the pound was exacerbated by a rousing patriotic declaration by the Prime Minister at the Tory Party Conference that, with Brexit, Britain was to become an independent, sovereign nation again. To which the currency markets gave a decisive 'that's what you think', illustrating yet again that no country can escape from the operation of the economic laws of world capitalism as well as reflecting the speculators' assumption that, if Britain leaves the single market as well as the EU, British exports are likely to suffer.



When it's Amber it means Caution

THE TORY Party has recently devoted some time to congratulating itself on being so progressive as to select a woman as leader. But then Theresa May's victory left her to make some entertaining changes. Like transforming Boris Johnson out of his mannered buffoonery into Foreign Secretary. But there were others whose claws had to be blunted by a spell in some lower but heavily taxing ministry, for example David Davis and Liam Fox with their Brexit planning. And Amber Rudd who became marooned in the Home Office, which is not exclusively concerned with the crises in domestic matters but needs also to dabble in some of the more intractably damaging outside events attuned to modern capitalism. Some consolation for this among the trappings of her office may be her access to the polished BMW motor car, overseen by some pointedly muscled attendants.

Share Ramping

Rudd was schooled at the expensive Cheltenham Ladies' College and Edinburgh University. Following the example of her father (who was once rated by an official enquiry as 'totally unfit' to be a director of any company) she began a career in banking and what is usually known as venture capital. This may have contributed to fitting her up to develop into 'human resources counselling' – which did not include therapy for anyone scraping by in zero-hours jobs or desperately unemployed existing in temporary housing. One of the companies she was involved in was the Lawnstone Group, in which her mother was a co-director and the fortunes of which can be described as 'unpredictable'. In this Rudd's work at finding some film 'extras' entitled her to be noted as something called an 'aristocracy co-ordinator'. Many of the

concerns Rudd was associated with seem to have been entangled in the devices of 'tax evasion' and one became notorious for share ramping – pushing baseless claims about the company's outlook to provoke an upward effect on its share price. One member of the staff at Rudd's Home Office was impressed – and perhaps ambitious – enough to needlessly remind us that 'It is a matter of public record that Amber had a career in business before entering politics'.

Hastings

This came to pass in 2005 when, as expected, she failed to win the Labour seat at Garston Liverpool. But it was not all failure; she was put on David Cameron's controversial 'A List' which resulted in her being the Conservative candidate for the more promising Hastings and Rye in Sussex where she won in 2010 with a majority of 1,993. That was the beginning of something big for in 2012 the Chancellor George Osborne chose her as his Parliamentary Private Secretary and some three years afterwards she got onto the Front Bench as Minister for Energy and Climate Change. At some stage it emerged that a couple of years before her election she had won a £50 voucher from the Chlamydia Screening Clinic in Hastings for a sexual health poem entitled *Loving You Is So Exciting* which included lines such as... 'Darling, let us spend the night, Sashay past St. Mary's Castle ...But why dear heart, did you not mention, What we'll do for contraception?... How about bingo on the beach?' But it could not all be meandering relaxation for a previous press secretary described Hastings as 'Shoreditch-on-Sea', which encouraged Rudd to respond that she was keen to be the Tory candidate there because 'I wanted to be within two hours of London' as if to escape from a constituency where she said 'You get people who are on benefits, who prefer to be on benefits by the seaside. They're not moving down here to get a job, they're moving down here to have easier access to friends and drugs and drink ...'

Poverty

For Hastings, with its history of the famous battle, its high Norman fort and its brand new pier, is one of the

English seaside towns which suffered so grievously from the competition of package holidays in the foreign sun. And then there is the matter of the town's recorded poverty. In November 2011 two of the housing estates there were among the worst affected by this problem, showing almost a third of the residents among the most deprived ten percent in the country. And so on: these figures might respond to a gentler interpretation, influenced by the emotions involved in Rudd's 1990 marriage to A. A. Gill, who is now classified as a 'recovering alcoholic'. Apart from that he is also a journalist – if this is an appropriate term for someone who receives generous pay from, among others, the *Sunday Times* for spouting assessments of restaurants which are little more than pretentious and irrelevant drivel. One fruit of Gill's labours is that over a recent five year period he was the subject of 62 complaints to the Press Complaints Commission; a typical example of this and of his general opinion of others was that the TV presenter Clare Balding is 'a big lesbian ... a dyke on a bike' and that in general English people are 'an ugly race ... lumpen and louty, coarse, unsubtle, beady-eyed, beefy-bummed'. He and Rudd were divorced in 1995.

Brother

But that turned out to be just one example of Rudd attracting stress-driven attention in a career which seems at times to be devoted to it. At this year's Annual Conference of the Conservative Party – her first from the eminence of Home Secretary, which may have encouraged her to use any means available to make an impression – she advocated that every company employing what she called 'foreign' workers should enter them on a register, which presumably could be checked for deletions, adjustments, manipulation ... Perhaps she did this as an example of crafty timing for it was the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, when Oswald Mosley's fascists on a racist march through London were fought on the streets. Her brother, who is the boss of a public relations company, spoke out to attack her on behalf of 'Those of us ... who want Britain to remain a beacon of tolerance and who find the denigration of non-British workers appalling ...' During the Tory leadership contest Rudd was briefly prominent for the forceful expression of her standpoint. It did not take her long to show us that in this she is not a novelty.

IVAN

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: 020 7609 0983 chris.dufton@talktalk.net

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY. Contact: 020 8740 6677. tenner@abelgratis.com

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sun. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: vincent.otter@globalnet.co.uk. 01242 675357.

East Midlands. Contact: Gareth Whitley, gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk

NORTH

Northeast branch. Contact: P. Kilgallon, 29 Nicholson Terrace, Newcastle NE12 9DP
Lancaster branch. Meets 3rd Sun. 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Contact: P. Shanon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

Manchester branch. Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. 0161 860 7189.

Southeast Manchester. Contact: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH.

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

Cumbria. Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

Yorkshire regional branch. Contact: Richard Rainferd, richardrainferd@gmail.com

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org 07973 142701.

South West regional branch. Meets 2nd Sat of even months. Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2pm (check before attending). Contact: Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. 0117 9511199.

Brighton Discussion Group. Contact: Anton

Pruden, anton@pruden.me
Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

Luton. Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

Redruth. Contact: Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. 01209 219293.

East Anglian regional branch. Meets 2nd Sat. on alternate months (see 'Meetings' for details).

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Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. 07890343044.

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Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427.

mariekev@eircom.net

Newtownabbey. Contact: Nigel McCullough. 028 90852062.

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thurs. 7-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmy@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk

Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburgh-branch/>

Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Weds. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

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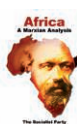
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The US voting system: not so democratic

THOSE WHO founded the United States and drafted its Constitution did not trust the vast majority of its citizens to vote. They left voting questions up to the states and established the Electoral College – rather than a majority vote of the people – to elect the president and vice president. It is government *of* the people, certainly, but not government *by* the people and definitely not *for* the people.

In reality, there is not one election, but 51 separate elections that are held simultaneously in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each state – not the federal government – sets its own voting hours, lays down the rules for registration and early voting, and decides what sort of voting machines and ballot forms it should use. And each state, not the federal government, decides what ID a voter must produce before casting a ballot.

For the presidency of the most powerful state in the world it is a choice of Clinton or Trump, Tweedledum or Tweedledummer. Not much of a choice. However, there will be other parties' candidates standing. Vying to be the main third party are the Green Party with Jill Stein, or the Libertarian Party and Gary Johnson but there will also be a plethora of other independent and 'write-in' candidates. There is the Constitution Party, then the Socialist Workers Party's Alyson Kennedy, Party of Socialism and Liberation's Gloria LaRiva, America's Party/ American Independent Party, Peace and Freedom Party, Prohibition Party, Reform Party USA, Socialist Party USA, Socialist Equality Party, Workers World Party, and the Veterans Party of America. Under state laws, political parties must 'qualify' for their candidates to be listed on the ballots and counted. The two major parties are qualified in every state but in this election both the Greens and the Libertarians have managed to get on the ballot more than ever before.

Many states have write-in laws concerning candidates where with varying rules the electorate can nominate their own candidate and, in theory, such write-in candidates can win the presidency. If the establishment refuses to work for the will of the people, the people may have to force their hand and maybe reach the point in history where the write-in vote can move the political process forward. Voting for a write-in contender is much more complicated than scribbling

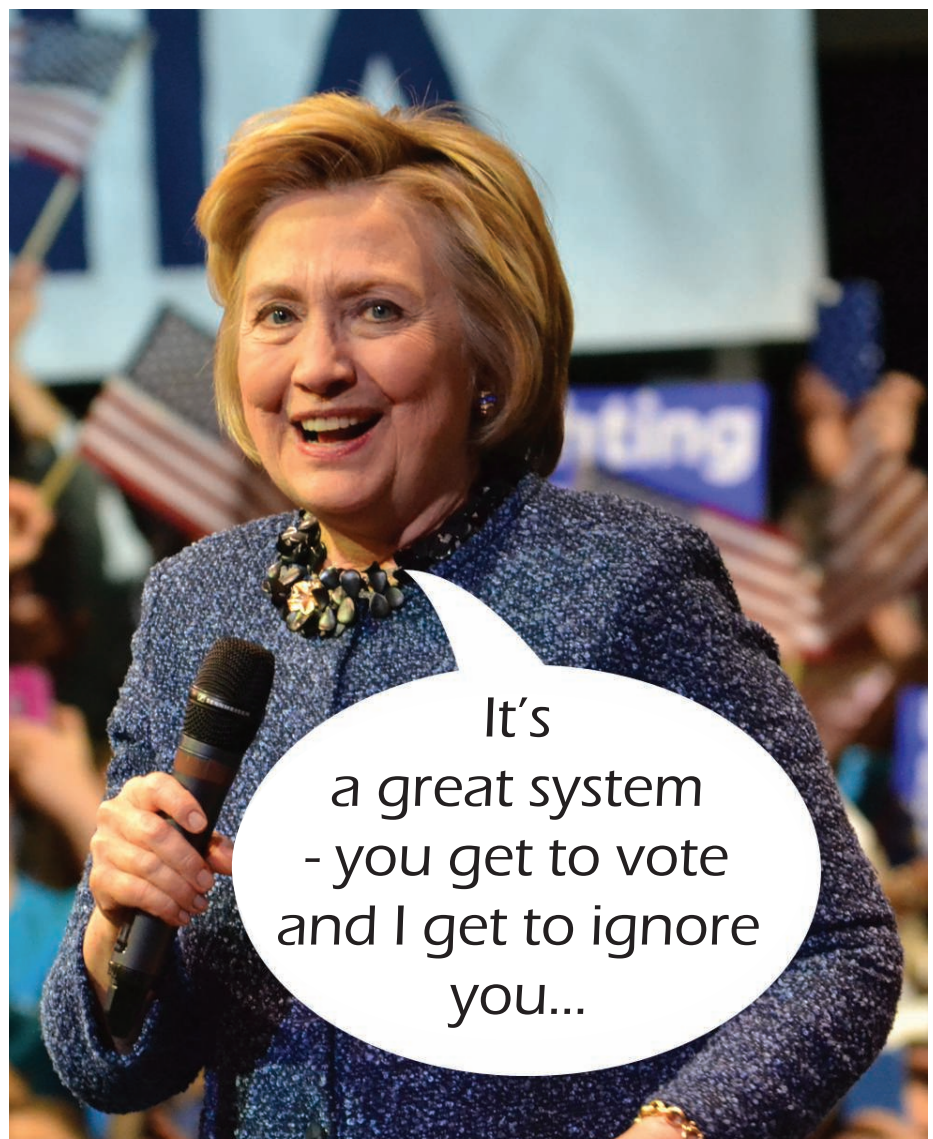
whatever name you please on the dotted line at the bottom of the ballot. Thirty-five states require that a write-in candidate must submit some form of affidavit and, sometimes, a filing fee at least one month before the election. 43 of the 50 states allow write-in candidates for president, but this starts the potential write-in candidate at a disadvantage. Assuming that hurdle can be cleared, the Electoral College is the problem. The write-in candidate would have to scramble to get slates of electors ready for all of the 43 states, so that those electors can vote for the write-in candidate when the Electoral College meets in December. If the write-in candidate did happen to win the popular vote, there would be a problem. When people vote, they vote for electors, and not for the presidential candidates. 43 states, representing 494 electoral votes. While a president has never been elected by write-in, at least one current United States Senator has been.

When it comes to elections where

there are no socialists standing socialists urge fellow-workers to learn more about capitalism and exploitation. And because we think that, in future, the election system could be used in a constructive way we exercise our right to vote. We cast a write-in vote by writing "SOCIALISM" or "WORLD SOCIALISM" across the ballot paper. What's the alternative? To not vote at all? More and more people are doing this, and it's not as bad as voting for one or other of the parties that stand for keeping capitalism going. But it's a bit of a cop-out. The anarchists like it, because they don't believe in electoral political action. We don't agree with their view. Our ancestors were right to struggle for the vote. The fact that up to now it hasn't been used properly is no reason for rejecting it as ineffectual.

We say in this 2016 US presidential election, the working class should write-in for 'WORLD SOCIALISM'.

ALJO





Ditch these ugly gargoyles

At the time of writing, the presidential campaign of Donald Trump is veering between tragedy and farce. His contempt for women, Mexicans, Muslims and all those outside his own white, male, billionaire peer group is twisting defiantly into an ugly parody, more grotesque than any fiction. Yet his screaming unelectability still carries tens of millions of Americans feeling sufficient affinity with his prejudices to continue supporting him. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton, whose own hideous record of militarism and single-minded dedication to supporting the parasites of Wall Street in their exploitation of the 99 percent of the population who are excluded from their club might otherwise have been spotlighted, is allowed to pose alongside Trump as the humane alternative.

Have you ever heard any voter saying, in any election, in any country ever, what a hard time they were having choosing between the candidates because they were all so amazing, appealing and attractive in what their programmes and policies offered? Of course not. The uneasy and uncomfortable feeling which pervades much of the population prior to an election stems from just the opposite of that. Many people hesitate over which of the options to vote for, as they are struggling to select the 'lesser evil'. This is because virtually all political candidates, world-wide, in all elections, are currently standing on a programme which is simply one or other variant of the

ridiculous social system we already have. The 'acceptable' limits for change on offer have been pre-conditioned into a population which has absorbed the assumption that the fundamentals of current society are ultimately both normal and unchangeable.

It has become fashionable recently for social trends to be described on a per-second or per-day basis. A certain type of crime is recorded on average 'once every two days'. A famous



They're both right



supermarket sells a Christmas hamper 'once every three seconds'. But the most shocking and important revelation of this kind is rarely discussed. Across the world today, on average, a child dies of starvation roughly once every second. Even the most conservative of economists and agricultural experts have long conceded that the natural resources of the planet make that fact totally unnecessary. It is something caused one hundred percent by social, not natural causes. Even in the case of specific localised famines or natural disasters, it is purely a social and political barrier which prevents huge quantities of suitable food being simply flown in within the hour.

That barrier to bringing resources to where they are needed, whether houses for poorly housed Londoners, or food to starving children in less developed parts of the world, or life-saving operations to people currently forced to stare at their calendars and wonder if their place on the long waiting-list will arrive before they die anyway, that barrier is the same in all cases. It is that we currently live under a social regime in which all of the key social resources are owned, controlled and monopolised by a tiny minority of the population. Those multi-millionaire investors, or fund controllers, or state bureaucrats who are in that position of power over the world's wealth, are caught in a battle with each other for expansion which creates an imperative that, whatever their wishes, they are compelled to increase their profits at all times regardless of the cost to human life.

The social machinery, of which this description is merely a cursory sketch, has evolved through the past several hundred years of global human history. However, social change and evolution has never and will never stand still. Those millions of people who find it hard to see any appeal in any of the political candidates on offer are in fact feeling a deep distaste for the socially insane system which all of those politicians, of every banner, represent and embody. Those millions of people who are not happy with this current social regime are

surely the seed of huge social change, which may be unfolding in the coming months and years. It is in our very nature as human beings to be social, to use complex co-operation to solve our problems and meet our needs. John Donne wrote that 'no man is an island' in the 17th century and it is so much more evident today, when one product we enjoy has often been manufactured with components from several different continents and has involved input from any number of our fellow humans in its conception, design and delivery.

In the changes to come, those who have recognised this key significance of that conflict between the vast and relentlessly pursued profits of the one percent (or less) and the needs of the rest of us, can accelerate the arrival of a society which would meet the needs of all. The 99 percent whose lives are indirectly devoted to serving those investors and providing their riches whilst we struggle with various degrees of relative poverty, have a great weapon. Awareness, consciousness, self-education, mutual education in the realities of the current state of society can only lead to a final withdrawal of our consent to this social insanity. The political charade of which Trump versus Clinton was just the latest circus side-show masks the fact that the power of the few ultimately rests entirely on the acquiescence and support of the many. Their system noisily creaks towards Armageddon, with its rapidly worsening environmental crisis, of which climate change is a manifestation, its terrifying wars born of the power and profit struggles between rival power blocs, and its prosaic but tragic suffering of a million forms of poverty. Our only hope is to work relentlessly to build a movement which withdraws its support for that system in its entirety, which ceases to vote for any of its political figurehead gargoyles, and instead constructs a democratic political movement devoted to dispossessing that minority and using the world's resources to meet the world's needs.

CLIFFORD SLAPPER



Aberfan: Disaster In The Hillsides

During the early winter of 1966 Hoover Limited sent a minor manager from their vacuum cleaner factory in West London to the massive plant in Merthyr Tydfil South Wales where they made washing machines. The manager took a train to Cardiff where he was picked up by one of the company cars and chauffeur to take him to a hotel where he was to stay for a couple of nights. During the journey both men were silent, without the chatter which usually enlivened their journeys together. When they arrived at the hotel they got out of the car and looked across to some high land where floodlit earth machines were at work. Then the driver spoke. 'Aberfan' he said. It was November 1966 and they were

looking at the site of the worst mining-related disaster in British history.

Aberfan is a village in South Wales which was once heavily dependent on employment at the nearby Merthyr Vale colliery. It now has a community centre, flourishing with its swimming pool, fitness rooms and café. There are also two schools, which provoke unbearable memories of that tragedy fifty years ago. Coal mining began there in 1869, when a pit was sunk on the banks of the Afon Taff; in 1875 the first commercial coal was brought to the surface – the beginning of a history proud enough to accentuate the grief and misery which devastated the village in October 1966. On that occasion the deaths did

not originate underground, in a coal mine; many of the people who died were buried and suffocated in lethal slurry from the open ground above. A total of 144 people were killed in minutes; 116 were children and no survivors were found after 11am. Many of those who did survive have since suffered from persistent psychological disorders – for example the *British Journal of Psychiatry* in 2003 recorded that half have suffered from PTSD, which for about a third of them will persist as a lifetime disorder. A typical comment was by the author Laurie Lee who, after visiting Aberfan a year afterwards, described the school children there as ‘...the unhealed scar tissue of Aberfan’. The colliery was closed in 1989.

Slurry

The basic cause of the disaster was tipping – the deposit of spoil of varying content and consistency which had been extracted from the colliery, onto the ground overlooking Aberfan when more convenient lower sites had been filled to their limit. By 1966 there were, looming above the area so that they could be distantly viewed from that hotel, a number of mounds – or tips – which were known by numbers 1 to 7, the last of which was the most ominous. There was no proper regular inspection and maintenance of the tips to check on their stability although they were composed of loose rock and other extracted material within a massive layer of sandstone. This was a dangerously absorbent composition which through the addition of water from underground springs could develop into a slope steep enough to accelerate the descent of the heavier spoil and slurry which would wipe out whatever – and whoever – lay in its path. In fact some local councils had questioned, in 1963, whether it was safe to dispose of the colliery waste in that way, particularly when in the direct path of such a descending geological missile there were the village primary and senior schools as well as other inhabited buildings. But any such questions were effectively ignored by the local National Coal Board.

Schools

On that dreadful day – 21 October 1966 – South Wales had already suffered several spells of torrential rain, which in itself was enough of a problem for the pupils of the local Pantglas School as they scurried from home to the last school day before breaking up for the half-term holiday. Soon after 9.15 am a mass of liquid containing material brought up from the mine broke free from the tips and began to smash down

towards the village and the homes and the schools and the children below. A gang of workmen who were on Tip 7 to inspect a fault with the railway which carried the disposable material from the mine were resting with a cup of tea when they saw the rapidly approaching disaster but they were unable to warn the village about it because the cable of their telephone had been stolen (although the subsequent enquiry was clear that no warning could have improved the situation). The gang watched helplessly as a mass of over 150,000 cubic metres of saturated mining spoil broke free, moving down the slope in a series of surges. Some of it clung to the ground, leaving about 40,000 cubic metres to carry on into Aberfan. ‘All I could see’ remembered one of them ‘... was waves of muck, slush and water... I couldn’t see-nobody could ...’ The first victims were a farm and twenty houses which were swiftly obliterated with all the occupants. At Pantglas School the teachers were checking and recording attendance when the buildings were overwhelmed by a compound of muddy rubble up to ten metres deep. One eight-year-old recalled ‘... a tremendous rumbling sound and all the school went dead ... Everyone just froze in their seats. I just managed to get up and I reached the end of my desk when the sound got louder and nearer, until I could see the black out of the window. I can’t remember any more’. The slurry eventually came to halt at about 9.15am; the damage had been done and by 11am the last living child had been brought out from the school; it was several more days before the last body could be found.

Nationalised

The reaction of their employers, in whatever context, and their political defenders was tediously predictable. One of the more prominent of these was the late Claude Granville Lancaster who went to school at Eton then trained at the Royal Military College Sandhurst and who eventually inherited the excessively stately Palladian Kelmars Hall in Leicestershire from his father along with the family investments in coal mining and farming. Like his father he was a Conservative MP, in his case for Fylde. When the Attlee government nationalised the coal industry Lancaster recognised the inevitable and ‘... gave all his support to the National Coal Board ... to do his best to bring what he felt was much-needed drive and decisiveness to its cumbersome and slow-moving organisation’. He had an early opportunity to live up to these standards when the slurry came down on Aberfan but he was abroad, in what were then known as the Trucial States (since 1971 the United

Arab Emirates). Soon after he returned another MP asked him to comment on the possible cause of the tragedy. To which this meticulous expert in coal mining replied ‘I fancy that you will find that it was a trickle of water’.

Another, rather different, example was a man who was raised, not into the ancient land-owning nobility but by Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to be chairman of a key nationalised industry. This was Alfred Robens who was Labour MP for Wansbeck and then Blyth until he took over Britain’s coal mines which also entailed him being ennobled, so that he became Baron Robens of Woldingham.

continued p.18



A memorial to the disaster

Security at Zero

We consider some aspects of working-class insecurity under capitalism, including its history, recent developments and the current situation.

Being a wage worker involves being exploited, creating profits for the employer and being ordered around by bosses. Another objectionable part is the insecurity that wage labour implies. As the markets go up and down, demand slackens off, new technology is introduced, companies restructure and outsource, or unemployment increases, workers can be laid off and find themselves on the dole or forced to accept a lower wage and either shorter or longer hours, or less control over their work, both its content and amount. There are various terms used, including casual and vulnerable employment, but they all point to workers' problems.

The Industrial Revolution is usually seen as ushering in an age of exploitation and working-class misery. But in *Liberty's Dawn* Emma Griffin argues that it had many

positive consequences, at least for men workers (these applied far less, if at all, to women and children). One the basis of autobiographies written by workers, she claims that 'opportunities in the workplace were brighter for adult men in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than they had been at any other time in the eighteenth century or before'. Before about 1750, for instance, men often suffered much unemployment and underemployment, since in pre-industrial times work was in short supply, and in agriculture it was very seasonally-based. Factory work also offered more stable and continuous earnings than cottage industry. So the Industrial Revolution supposedly made employment more secure, for some workers at least.

Yet the tough economic times of the 1830s and 1840s still led to much unemployment, though there are no reliable



The Industrial Revolution: Nant y Glo, Monmouthshire, by Gastineau, Henry G., 1791-1876

statistics. The social researcher Henry Mayhew, whose studies covered 1849–51, believed that ‘only about a third of the labouring people in the country were fully employed, another third were partially employed, and the remaining third wholly unemployed at any given time’ (J.F.C. Harrison: *Early Victorian Britain*).

The point here is not how accurate the picture presented by Griffin is, but to emphasise that the poorest part of the population have traditionally endured much insecurity in terms of employment as a result of their subordinate status. Even if this was, to some extent and for some people, allayed by the coming of industrial production, the problems and insecurity have remained since the days she was writing about.

Probably the best-known example of the use of casual labour was in the docks, where tides and weather affected the number of ships that needed loading or unloading at any time, and trade in foodstuffs in particular was subject to large seasonal fluctuations. Dock workers could be taken on for just a few hours, and were paid when the work was completed. The number of dockers needed during peak periods meant that at other times many were left idle and unpaid. Various inquiries were held, and recommendations made, and workers and unions demanded better treatment, but it was not until 1940 that much was done, when it became apparent that docks and their workers would play a crucial role in the Second World War. From 1941, under the National Dock Labour Corporation, dockers had to present themselves for work twice a day, and were paid a ‘retaining allowance’ if not actually employed. The post-war Dock Workers’ (Regulation of Employment) Act of 1946 enabled greater regularity of employment, and pay if not employed.

One of the modern-day versions of casual employment is the so-called zero-hours contract. These have no proper legal status, but the idea is that under them the worker is not guaranteed any hours of work, and can be called into their workplace to labour for whatever time the employer needs them for. They are popular with employers but not with workers, and they are illegal in many countries, France for instance. Some workers supposedly like the flexibility implied, since they can turn down any request to work and do not need to work for the employer if they do not want to (for childcare reasons, perhaps). Except, of course, that this flexibility is largely illusory, as being dependent on a wage is what defines their position in the working class: refusing work means no pay, just as not being called in for work does. And turning down work may make it less likely you will be wanted in future. This is what being on a zero-hours contract is like: not knowing how much work you will have



Henry Mayhew

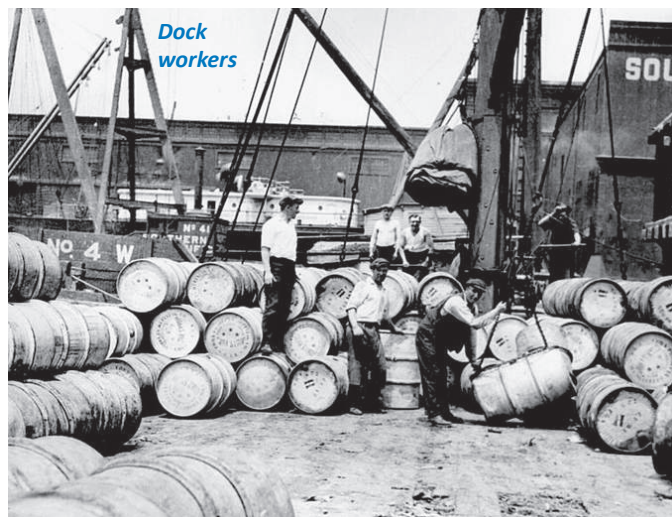
in any week or month, so having little idea how much you will earn; the constant worry about not working and earning enough to get by.

The official line (from gov.uk) is that such contracts are appropriate in certain circumstances, such as when there are seasonal peaks in demand, for instance at Christmas, but they ‘should not be considered as an alternative to proper business planning and should not be used as a permanent arrangement if it is not justifiable.’

There has been a lot of publicity lately about the use of zero-hours contracts at Sports Direct, but they are used much more widely than this. In September the Office for National Statistics reported that just over 900,000 workers (2.9 percent of those employed) were on zero-hours contracts, over 150,000 more than a year before. Such workers only earn about two-thirds of the average for other workers. Seventy percent of over-25s on zero-hours contracts have been with the same employer for over twelve months, so they can hardly be seen as a stepping stone to full-time permanent employment. Sports Direct, like Wetherspoons and McDonald’s, have made great play of offering permanent contracts to those on zero hours, but this will take some time to put into effect, and will still leave hundreds of thousands of workers in this subordinate position.

Deborah Orr (*Guardian Online*, 10 September) argued that zero-hours contracts are better than a ‘job for life’, where ‘for a lot of people the reality was decade after decade of turning up like clockwork to do work they hated, and longing for retirement’. But few people truly had jobs for life, and many zero-hours contracts involve boring work that is indeed hated by those doing it. Orr was right to note the spread of zero-hours contracts, but wrong to welcome this, for they mean insecurity, low pay and being at the mercy of the employer and the market, even more so than in the case of the majority of workers.

PAUL BENNETT



Where is everybody?

If you go out into the country at night, you might find a spot far enough away from our glaring towns and cities to allow you to see the apparently innumerable twinkling points of light which remind us that our sun is only a minor star in a minor star system. Scientists tell us that even in our own galaxy, the Milky Way, there must be at least a hundred billion stars. The Milky Way is just a small and unimportant galaxy. Altogether, the astronomers say, there are probably something like ten trillion galaxies in the universe. That is, in the universe which we are able to observe; there may be a lot more galaxies out beyond the edge of our knowledge. To write out the number of stars in the observable universe you would need a one, followed by twenty-four noughts – that is, a million million million million stars. And very many of those stars are now believed to have habitable planets circling round them. So some, in fact a vast number of those planets might have developed intelligent life. Scientists have been trying for years

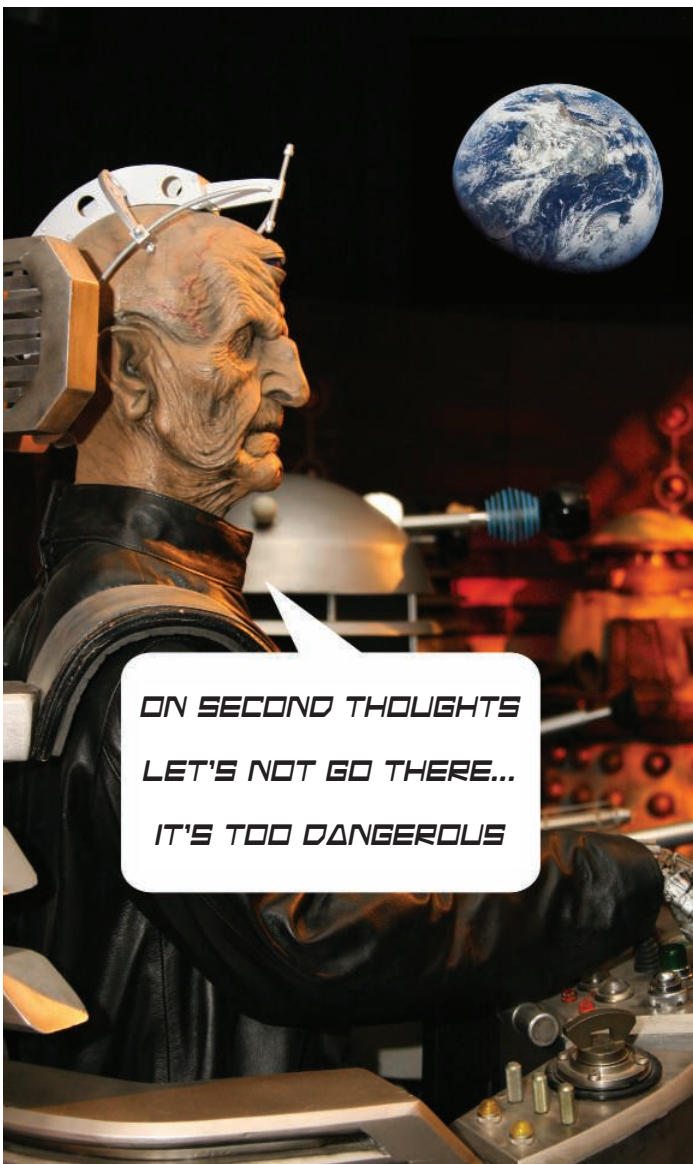
to pick up any signals from alien civilizations, but have drawn a complete blank.

This situation has puzzled scientists for a long time, and as long ago as the 1950s the physicist Enrico Fermi demanded – where is everybody? In such a fantastically enormous universe, it's just not possible that we should be alone. Now two physics professors, Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw, have written a new book, *Universal: A Guide to the Cosmos*, which offers an explanation. When they get to a certain point of development, the authors write, all civilizations probably produce both extraordinarily powerful weapons, and also destructive greenhouse gases. But (so the theory goes) they do not produce a political or social system which can handle these things. And so, either by ruining their own atmosphere by pollution from industry and transport, or by engaging in mutually destructive warfare, each civilisation destroys itself. So that's why we on the Earth, in defiance of all rational expectation, are on our own. All other developing civilisations either have not got to the point of trying to communicate, or have destroyed themselves.

According to the *Daily Mail* (9 October) Professor Cox said: 'One solution to the Fermi paradox is that it is not possible to run a world that has the power to destroy itself and that needs global collaborative solutions to prevent that. It may be that the growth of science and engineering inevitably outstrips the development of political expertise, leading to disaster.'

Does it sound familiar? It would not need much imagination to see our planet going the same way. We should at least ask ourselves whether the devastating power which the human race now possesses is already beyond the control of humanity's poor efforts at statesmanship. The countries which have already had their industrial revolution are trying to limit, sometimes not very successfully, their pollution of the atmosphere; countries which are now going through an industrial revolution feel they should be allowed to emit the same amount of pollution that other countries did years ago. As for the other way in which these authors think all other civilizations have probably killed themselves, the world has potentially reached that stage as well. As each capitalist state fights to preserve its territory, its trade, its position in the world, each armed with hydrogen bombs and other fearsome weapons, it is unfortunately quite possible that some hot-headed maniac (and there are plenty of those who have manoeuvred themselves into power in various countries round the world – can you imagine what a 'President Trump' might decide to do?) could plunge us all into nuclear hostilities which could destroy or cripple the entire human race. So we desperately need 'global collaborative solutions' and 'political expertise' to avoid disaster. If you look at it this way, socialism – which would end the pollution of our atmosphere, and also extinguish the competitive hostility which capitalism inevitably entails – is not only a desirable alternative, but the only one.

ALWYN EDGAR



MARXISM

INCLUSIVE OR REDUCTIVE?

Upon reading Karl Marx's *Capital* for the first time many are surprised by its inclusive nature. Instead of the anticipated focus on economics the reader finds themselves immersed in philosophy, history and literature together with many other references. This is not only a reflection of the author's well-known reputation as a polymath but it also reminds us that all disciplines are dependent, to a lesser or greater degree, on each other. But how can we reconcile this with the received notion of Marxism as a reductive political theory; that in the final analysis all social relations are dependent on the mode of production?

This may well be one of the reasons that Karl himself was sure that he was not a Marxist. But if a philosopher or historian was to exhaustively give you an account of a social phenomenon without reference to the relevant contemporary economic structure (as some still attempt to do) many of us would feel it to be incomplete at best and misleading at worst. This is primarily what socialists mean when we say we're Marxists or that we're using a Marxist analysis; the attempt to see through prevailing ideology and expose the underlying economic relationships that create such intellectual superstructures. This seemingly reductive technique has alienated many intellectuals who like to defend their own sectarian esoteric disciplines by reference to the intellectual division of labour. They reject any attempt to suggest that the multiplicity of theories and philosophies can have a common origin. So is there a contradiction inherent within Marxism between inclusiveness and reductionism?

When a Marxist speaks of ideology they mean something much more extensive than merely a set of explicit ideas. We refer to the 'normalisation' of political and moral values. For instance most people accept the principal of production for profit as a 'normal' relationship between people engaged in industry. Socialists point to the 'abnormality' of a relationship based on the exploitation of one human by another. Because it has become an unquestioned relationship most economists fail to see its underlying exploitative nature. Without the benefit

of a Marxist perspective they can never fully understand economics. Some propagandists are aware of this and for them the infamous phrase of Dr Goebbels that: 'If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it' seems as true as it ever was. This is not to say that all studies in economics since Marx have been pointless but they are incomplete without his contributions.

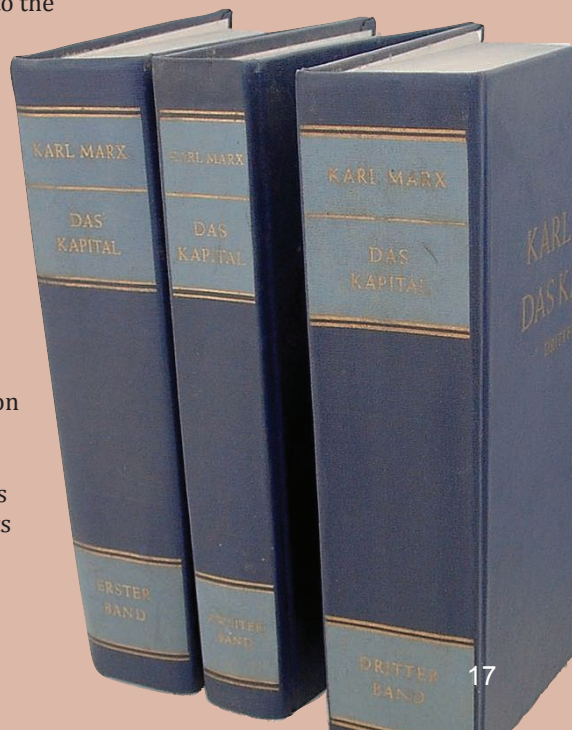
Another feature of the relationship of exploitation within capitalism is called alienation. This occurs because of the lack of control the individual feels during their productive life. The great joy of creative production is replaced by a monotonous set of increasing targets and goals presided over by a 'boss' who makes the decisions in the name of profit. The resulting depression and emotional exhaustion will be presented to a doctor who will fail to see or fail to act on the basic underlying inhuman relationships that create such alienation. So again, in the absence of a Marxist analysis psychology and medicine must inevitably fail the individual in terms of their mental and physical health.

We can see that in the absence of a penetrating political analysis both the disciplines of economics and psychology are impotent. We can make a similar case for history, philosophy, sociology etc. (probably all of the 'humanities' within which, this author at least, includes the 'social sciences'). Having

made the case that many disciplines are incomplete without the insights available via the Marxist perspective, can we also say that Marxism itself would be weakened without the inclusion of at least some of the discoveries made by these other disciplines?

Could it be that rather than providing alternative explanations for social development they are, in fact, complementary parts of the same whole – at least potentially, once they're stripped of ideological prejudice. The intellectual division of labour has served to disguise the real focus of study. This division, in its turn, serves the ideological purpose of preventing access to the truth. It is not that Marxism is reductive but that philosophy, economics, psychology, history, anthropology etc. are unaware that their goal is the same as Marxism – the understanding of, and the liberation from, the causes of human suffering. Many of humanity's intellectual pursuits have this political

Continued p.22



Aberfan continued

He took to all of this with a determination which was expressed in his car being numbered NCB1 and his access to a private jet plane and a posh flat in a most expensive part of London. These privileges he defended behind a style of management later described most moderately as demanding.

Chancellor

This style came under focus as the people of Aberfan were grappling with their demanding emergencies. To be specific on that day of 21st October Robens did not, as was expected of him as the overlord of the mines, attend that scene of suffering – although his staff falsely assured the Ministry of Power that he was there soothing the distress of the people. In fact he chose to attend a ceremony at the University of Surrey to be installed as Chancellor. The anger which this aroused locally was aggravated by his opinion that the original cause of the avalanche was ‘some ... natural unknown springs’ which was particularly provocative to the grieving local people who had

long-standing acquaintance with that very water source since they had played there as children. When the official enquiry was seriously critical of Robens’s behaviour throughout he offered to resign from the NCB but this was dismissed as unnecessary. At the same time the NCB refused to pay the full cost of removing the tips- an attitude which persisted until the first Blair government agreed to meet the bill – although without the interest which would have considerably raised the total. This evasion was pointedly described by another Labour MP Leo Abse as ‘... the graceless pavane danced by Lord Robens and the Minister, as the chairman of the National Coal Board’ and more recently by the *Geoscientist* – *The Fellowship Magazine of the Geological Society of London*: ‘What happened in Aberfan was a mass betrayal of intergenerational equity ... not only ripped the heart out of one small Welsh village - it sucked life out of an entire industry’. When Robens took over there were 698 pits; when he left there were 292. Which left the Thatcher government to carry on so that in the Merthyr area nearly 30 percent of the

able-bodied were unemployed, apart from the other adults whose industrial diseases had led to them being registered as disabled.

Coal mining was always a dangerous occupation, to be taken up only because there was nothing less threatening on offer. This was the case in Aberfan. At the same time the miners had to struggle against a poverty as concentrated as the risks they endured in and around the pits. And the harsh reality of all this is that the employing class have an enduring priority that production – of coal or whatever – should be as cheap as possible. As they did in Aberfan with the over-looming tips and the workers’ homes. This was untouched by the continuing requirements of nationalisation with the substitution of management by an ex-left wing Labour MP for a traditionally aristocratic Tory. In commemorating that disaster it must not be ignored that Aberfan was an episode entirely typical of the demands of class ownership for human suffering and denial.

IVAN



John McDonnell imagines

AT THE end of his speech to the Labour Party conference in September, shadow chancellor John McDonnell offered a definition of socialism. Invoking John Lennon he orated:

‘Imagine the society that we can create. It’s a society that’s radically transformed, radically fairer, more equal and more democratic. Yes, based upon a prosperous economy but an economy that’s economically and environmentally sustainable and where that prosperity is shared by all. That’s our vision to rebuild and transform Britain. In this party you no longer have to whisper it, it’s called socialism.’

Evidently McDonnell hasn’t got much of an imagination as this is something that politicians in the other parties can, and do, subscribe to without calling it socialism. They’re right. It isn’t.

It is not even what in the days of Clause Four the Labour Party used to imagine was socialism. In those days Labour believed that to govern in the

interest of trade unionists and other workers they would have to control at least ‘the commanding heights of the economy’ through a substantial state-owned sector. The Thatcher government in the 1980s abolished that.

The nationalised sector of the economy wasn’t socialism either, but a form of state capitalism. Not that McDonnell is promising to bring it back. He accepts that the commanding heights of the economy are to remain in private capitalist hands and is offering only a bit of state intervention and direction:

‘Good business doesn’t need no government. Good business needs good government ... the next Labour government will be an interventionist government ... our government will create an entrepreneurial state that works with the wealth creators, the workers and the entrepreneurs to create the products and the markets that will secure our long term prosperity.’

Don’t ask us what an ‘entrepreneurial state’ is. It sounds like a state that will help entrepreneurs.

He did promise that, in the lowlands and foot hills of the economy, Labour ‘will promote a renaissance of cooperative and worker ownership.’ Experience, however, has shown that such enterprises don’t last long as they

are unable to compete with ordinary capitalist enterprises in the same sector.

None of those set up by Tony Benn when he was Secretary of State for Industry in the 1970s survived. But even if they had, worker-controlled enterprises producing for sale on a market with a view to profit is not socialism and not what socialists want. Workers in them have to discipline themselves to work harder and cut costs. It’s what’s been called ‘workers’ self-exploitation’.

McDonnell’s ‘vision’ accepts that a future Labour government would have to act within the framework of a capitalist economy dominated by private, profit-seeking enterprises. That means that it would have to allow these enterprises to make profits and in fact that it has to work with them and not against them, unless, that is, it wants to provoke an economic downturn.

Labour Deputy Leader, Tom Watson, provided a more apt ending for McDonnell’s speech when he told the delegates:

‘Capitalism, comrades, is not the enemy.’

How could it be when you are committed to running a capitalist economy?



Soap Gets In Your Eyes

If you're watching *EastEnders* and your mind starts to wander away from its latest round of tragedies, you start noticing the odd little conventions of soap operas. Why do characters in soaps never sit down to watch soap operas, for example? How do they find the time to go to the pub several times a day? Why do so few families have washing machines and instead air their dirty linen in the launderette? Why does every conversation end with one person looking pensively into the distance?

Since it began in 1985, *EastEnders* has clocked up over 5,300 episodes, and attracts audiences of around ten million viewers when there's a big shock storyline. It's more dour than rivals *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* usually are, and right from its inception was intended to reflect everyday issues facing Londoners.

So does *EastEnders* really represent 'working class life'? We rarely see characters at work, except when they're behind a bar or a shop counter and chatting. Having a job would get in the way of their complicated, convoluted relationships. Issues like debt, loss of employment etc are frequent sources of struggle, but the characters never talk about politics. Phil and Grant Mitchell didn't have a discussion about which way they would vote in the EU referendum, for example. In fact, the referendum wasn't even mentioned. Albert Square doesn't get affected by real-world concerns like elections, wars and *The Great British Bake Off*.

But do we expect soap operas to be realistic, and mirror life within the sound of Bow bells? If Albert Square was a real place, no-one would want to live there, given the number of murders and disasters which happen, especially every Christmas. Thankfully, real life tends to be more humdrum, and if *EastEnders* really was realistic, hardly anyone would bother tuning in.

Or should we say that soaps are realistic to the extent that the characters behave authentically in an unrealistically constant succession of calamities and other life-changing events? As writer Steve Neale described, soap storylines are shaped by coincidences, chance meetings, revelations and last-minute rescues, far more than real lives are. Recently, *EastEnders*' characters have faced alcohol addiction, miscarriage, homophobia, murder and redundancy, among other issues. The producers

often consult with specialists about how the most emotive subjects should be approached, partly to shape our perceptions of them. A storyline about domestic abuse, for instance, would be carefully planned to raise awareness among viewers of the hurt and damage it causes and the support available. Soap operas therefore have some value and influence in highlighting social issues, even if they don't relate them to a wider social context. This means that soap characters don't necessarily behave in 'realistic' ways, but in ways which reflect what the programme-makers want to say. All drama is, by definition, contrived and even something improvised can't reflect the ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty of real life. So it's too much to expect soap operas to copy real life.



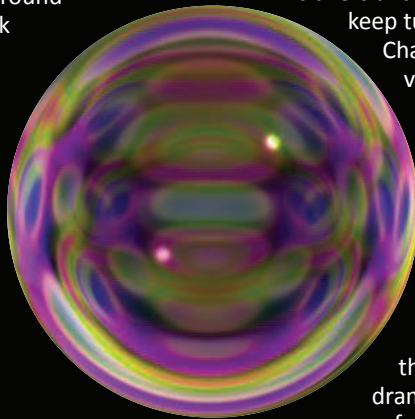
Xmas 1986, 30 million tuned into the most watched episode in UK history

We gawp at soaps partly for schadenfreude – watching the characters live through each misery. When a prominent character is about to get killed off, this is often ghoulishly advertised with trailers and on TV guide magazine covers. But we wouldn't keep tuning in if we didn't find the characters engaging.

Characters in soap operas are, to some extent, vicarious friends and families. We can snoop on their dodgy deals, affairs, lies and rows, because their lives tend to be more eventful than our own. Soaps also give us a vicarious sense of community. How many of us know as many of our neighbours as the residents of Albert Square do? Or in other words, how many of us know Dot Branning or Ian Beale better than we know some of our neighbours or colleagues?

Incidentally, if you've ever wondered why they're called 'soap operas', it's because these dramas originally tended to be sponsored by soap manufacturers. This term is appropriate, given that the characters and settings are set in a soapy bubble, away from everyday life.

MIKE FOSTER



Where do they find the time?

Changing climate

***A Farewell to Ice: A Report from the Arctic.* By Peter Wadhams. Penguin Books, 2016.**



Peter Wadhams is a professor of ocean physics at the University of Cambridge and former director of its Scott Polar Research Institute. Over 47 years as a polar researcher he has been on many

expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic.

His book straddles three literary genres. Part of it is a scientific exposition of the properties and structure of ice and how it forms under various conditions (quite differently in the Antarctic from in the Arctic, for instance). Other passages are a prose poem on the beauty of icy landscapes that only a few hundred people have ever seen. Above all, it is a warning of the gathering speed and momentum of climate change, culminating in a 'call to arms.'

The author explains all the positive feedbacks that are accelerating global heating. The most alarming new development, he argues, is the release of methane – a very powerful greenhouse gas – from shallow Arctic seas whose warming is starting to melt long-frozen seabed sediments. In his opinion, the seriousness of the situation is understated not only by those who deny the reality of human-made climate change but also by many of his fellow specialists in the field, such as climate modellers who stubbornly stick to the predictions generated by their models even when the latter conflict with recent field observations.

Although most of the book focuses on the Arctic, there is a very valuable chapter on the Antarctic. The Antarctic is rather isolated from the rest of the planet in geographical and meteorological terms, although if global heating continues it will eventually suffer the same fate as the Arctic.

Professor Wadhams takes the view that it is now too late to avert disaster without resort to geoengineering – that is, 'engineering' the earth in ways that will reduce incoming solar radiation, increase the albedo (reflectivity) of the Earth's surface or remove greenhouse gases from the air. (For more on geoengineering, see *Pathfinders* in the September 2010 and January 2011 issues of the *Socialist Standard*.)

The author's clear scientific explanations contrast with rather muddled treatment of economic and political matters. But credit where credit is due: there is one

paragraph in Chapter 13 where he does penetrate to the core of the problem facing our species:

'The world's rickety financial structure still requires perpetual growth in order to retain stability... Within the present capitalist system, as practiced by everyone including China, there is no way that a sustainable equilibrium society can be tolerated. Everyone knows that exponential growth ... cannot continue and will lead only to disaster, yet every finance minister seeks to encourage economic growth...'

Unfortunately, this is a flash in the pan. Wadhams does not develop this insight or explore its implications. Instead he reverts to blaming the situation on superficial factors like the greed that makes people buy SUVs and the fact that most political leaders have no scientific training (a noted exception being Margaret Thatcher, with whom Wadhams was in direct contact).

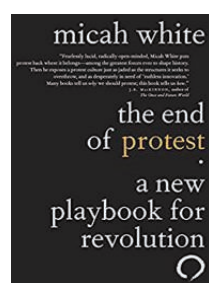
It is all very well to call for 'colossal programs on an international scale' – but there is no real world community to consider and undertake such programs. Who can imagine the rival capitalist powers pooling their efforts to bring back the Arctic ice? The same powers that right now are 'scrambling for the Arctic' – salivating over the profit-making opportunities opened up by the retreat of the ice and maneuvering to control the region's newly accessible resources (see 'Scramble for the Arctic,' *Material World*, September 2007)?

The crucial problem is not how to devise programmes to save our planet but how to create the world community.

STEFAN

Beyond protest

***The end of protest. A New Playbook for Revolution.* By Micah White. Alfred A Knopf. Canada. 2016.**



Micah White says he was one of those who thought up the idea of occupying Wall Street in September 2011. His proposed aim for this was to demand that Big Money be taken

out of American politics, but the Occupiers' demands soon went beyond this. According to him, he and others really believed that the occupation could topple Wall Street in the same way that demonstrations and occupations earlier in the year had toppled dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. This book is his explanation of why this didn't happen, why it was never likely to, and why capitalism is not going to be

overthrown in this way. Hence 'the end of protest', or at least of this kind of protest with this aim.

We could have told him that minority direct action of this sort is not the way to overthrow capitalism – as he himself points out, the state has the power and the majority-backed (even if manipulated) legitimacy to deal with such protests – but it is good to see someone who once believed this to be the way come to realise that it isn't.

So what is he now advocating? On the surface, something surprisingly similar to how we have envisaged revolution. He calls for a 'leaderless world revolution' in which, among other things, a 'World Party' will win political power in one country 'sparking an electoral insurrection in one place after another', meaning 'the electoral social movement would hop around the world from victory to victory'. The people, he says, 'must capture legislative and executive control constitutionally and legitimately' because this will assure mainstream support for the revolution. He compares his change of mind to Engels changing his about barricades and also advocating elections in place of an out-dated tactic.

That's as far as it goes as White envisages that the 'electoral social movement' should start by aiming to win control of 'sparsely populated towns and cities', declaring them liberated and running them without leaders. He himself is practising what he preaches, standing for mayor of Nehalem (population 291) in this month's US elections (we can report next month how he fared). He does not say on what platform he thinks elections should be contested. Since he still believes that a conscious minority can express 'the people's will' independently of what a majority of people at one time might think or want, it could well be something other than a full revolutionary programme, just democratic reforms.

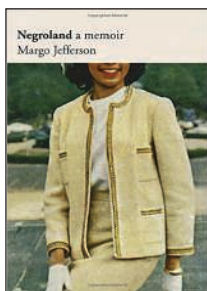
He has also gone mystical. At college he provocatively formed an atheist society but he now looks to divine or supernatural intervention to play a part in the revolution. This could lead to his other views not being taken seriously.

ALB



A Land Within

Negroland: a Memoir. By Margo Jefferson. Granta £12.99.



Jefferson was born in Chicago in 1947, and her father was a doctor. *Negroland* is her term for 'a small region of Negro America where residents were sheltered by a certain amount of privilege and plenty'.

The name includes 'Negro' because of this word's historical importance (in posters relating to runaway slaves, for instance), though she usually refers to herself as black, with 'African American' being for official contexts only. This volume is not exactly an autobiography but a series of anecdotes and reflections on life as a (relatively well-off) black woman in the US; Jefferson herself became a writer and journalist.

There is some brief history, such as on black slave-owners, and the segregation of the US Army in the Second World War. There are examples of discrimination from the 1950s, affecting even the inhabitants of 'Negroland': Jefferson's family were given inferior rooms in a hotel, and in their fairly select Chicago neighbourhood her father was stopped by police who asked if he had drugs in his bag (it contained medical equipment).

One point which emerges more than once is the extent to which 'race' is in the eye of the beholder. The author describes herself as being of African, Irish, English and Indian (Native American) descent. Her own skin is 'cream-brown', and a shop worker with black-brown skin asks her what her ethnic ancestry is. Many of her relatives could pass as white, and she refers to an uncle who worked as a travelling salesman and then 'stopped being white' when he retired.

In the US the fight for 'black rights' was dominated by men, and that for 'women's rights' by white women. She quotes one black feminist who argued that black women had spent years copying bad ideas from white women but then decided they wanted nothing to do with the one good idea of feminism. Jefferson will not say which of race, gender and class matters more, since all are 'basic elements of one's living'. Note, though, that this is not the Socialist analysis of class but one which sees the inhabitants of 'Negroland' as middle or even upper class.

But an insightful and often moving account.

PB

'We Only Want the Earth'

Among the anniversaries being marked this year is the centenary of the Dublin Easter Rising (see the March *Socialist Standard*). James Connolly, who was probably its best-known figure and who had to be tied to a chair so he could be executed by a British firing squad, is commemorated in an exhibition 'We Only Want the Earth' at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford. As the curators note, Connolly's life 'is often remembered more for the manner of his leaving it than for the politically active way he lived it' (echoes of the Thane of Cawdor in *Macbeth*).

The exhibition mainly consists of displays of books and pamphlets by or about Connolly and related political movements, together with some letters and panels containing photos and relevant information. It does not, however, say much to explain his move towards Irish nationalism, though it is stated that he had once argued that independence without socialism would just mean replacing one set of capitalist exploiters by another.

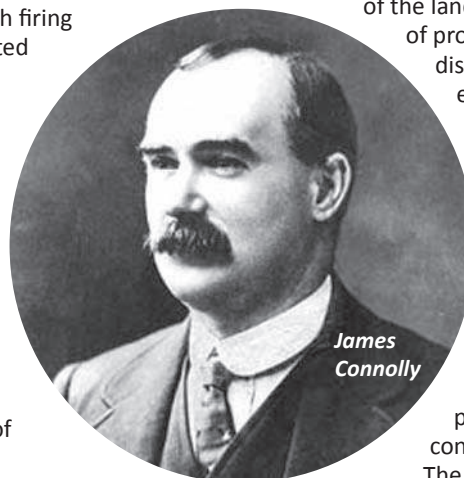
But then Connolly's status as a socialist in the first place is somewhat arguable. He had been a member of the Social-

Democratic Federation, and part of the Impossibleist revolt against H.M. Hyndman. However, the Irish Socialist Republican Party, which he helped found in 1896, stood for state-run banks and a minimum wage. Its aim, though not mentioned in this exhibition, was 'the

public ownership by the Irish people of the land, and instruments of production, distribution and exchange' (so not socialism, as there would still be exchange, and even at this date seen in national terms). He was opposed to divorce, and saw religion as a private matter, not connected to politics. The doomed 1916

uprising included a statement by the 'Provisional Government of the Irish Republic', which begins, 'In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland ...'. Connolly was one of the signatories of this and, even if we regard this phrase as just a piece of rhetoric, the whole text reveals the mystic nationalistic nonsense he was now involved in. A copy of this document is displayed in the Salford exhibition, but without any commentary on it.

PB



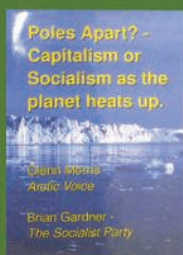
James Connolly

socialist party dvd



Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff

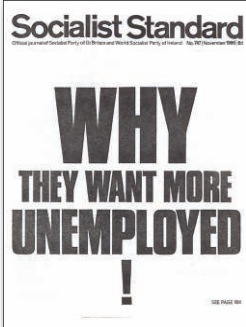
Takes a fresh look at the world, and challenges basic assumptions about capitalism.



Poles Apart?

Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up.

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50 Years Ago

Insult to Injury

MAKE NO mistake about it. The Labour government is out to cut our standard of living. To be sure,

they claim this is necessary so that standards can rise in the future. But we need take no notice of this. After all we've heard it so many times before from Labour and Tory alike. First it was Cripps, then Gaitskell, then Butler, then Thorneycroft, then Selwyn Lloyd and now Wilson. But the promised prosperous futures with steadily rising living standards have never appeared and, of course, they never will. You don't have to be a Socialist to be sceptical on this point.



What the government is trying to do is to freeze wages and salaries at July 20 levels and allow prices to rise to offset "tax increases and import price rises". If this works, our standard of living will have been cut and more of the wealth we produce will be available for profitable investment.

It's bad enough to have this attack on our living standards and to be intimidated by the "reserve powers" of the Prices and Incomes Act. But we have also to take Minister of Labour Gunter telling us that this is what we deserve as we have been "dishonest and thriftless" and clever Dick Crossman and the *New Statesman* telling us that this is a step towards Socialism.

It is surprising that there are still people who think that trade unionists and workers generally have something to gain from backing Labour.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, November 1966)

Trade or environment

'EVERYTHING IS now monetised'. You often hear that expression nowadays. It amounts to the same as the old expression, 'money makes the world go round'. In her speech to the Conservative Party Conference in October Andrea Leadsom's re-iterated this idea, but the Environment Secretary had little else to offer.

The speech was dominated by income figures and 'economic potential', as she put it. 'Grow, buy, sell', she said.

There was nothing of any insight from her into the problems or solutions that confront us concerning environmental degradation. Of course, you may not have expected complex analysis and argument, but you would have been excused for thinking that you were listening to the Trade Secretary. You would expect the Environment Secretary to at least address some of those problems and solutions as if she did know something about them, other than how much money could be generated from them.

She announced a 25 year plan for the environment but, again, gave little detail, (probably because there isn't any). The suspicion must be that any legislation to be introduced will give favour to commercial interests. Perhaps the recent handing out of the first fracking licence is stage one of that plan; and



Andrea Leadsom

this from a government that wants to leave the environment in a better state than they found it. Well, we've heard that before: Cameron's 'greenest government ever', (surely he meant meanest), has come to nothing.

The inherent problems in tackling the issues are difficult enough in themselves. The problem of having to fund the infrastructure projects necessary to rescue the environment, and the requirement to turn a profit demanded by private industry (effectively in charge of all infrastructure projects in Britain), only serve to make the solutions more difficult, or even impossible, to achieve. The curse of spiralling costs and contract re-negotiation reflect this very well, as we can see across all sectors – HS2, Crossrail. Thames Water Ring Main, Hinkley Point etc.

There never seems to be enough funding. But a lack of it isn't the problem. The problem is the idea of funding itself. While the system of production for profit remains in place there will never be enough funding, and we will move further and further away from the kind of environment we should all want to live in.

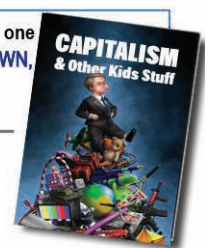
The socialist point of view is quite clear. Remove money, remove funding from the equation, and you remove the main barrier to technological advancement and, as concerns the environment, to a safe, secure future. A system of production for use, a moneyless society, a socialist society, would provide a real opportunity to create a sustainable and secure environment.

NM

"I've been teaching for 30 years, and I find this to be one of the best short films I have ever used" **DOUG BROWN, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, NORTH ARIZONA UNIVERSITY**

Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff is a short film from The Socialist Party which questions some of the most basic assumptions about life in capitalism.

For a copy, complete the order form on page 7



Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

NOVEMBER 2016

LONDON

Thursday 17 November, 8.00 p.m.

"Patriarchy: alive and kicking in the 21st century"

Open discussion facilitated by Carla Dee
Venue: Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Avenue, NW5 2RX

DECEMBER 2016

WAKEFIELD

Saturday 3 December, 1.00 p.m.

**Wakefield Socialist History Group
"The Politics of Antonio Gramsci"**

Howard Moss from the Socialist Party will be one of the speakers

Venue: The Red Shed, 18 Vicarage Street South, Wakefield, WF11 1QX

EC Meeting

Saturday 3 December 2016, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.



Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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Marxism continued

nature and Marxism represents the first structural understanding of this simple fact. Seen in this light the intellectual sectarianism and inter-discipline competition we perceive today is utterly absurd.

This may seem to most people to be an unduly idealistic view of the motivation for intellectual endeavour but Marxists reject the idea that the belief in human potential is rooted in delusional ideals. We are well aware that many are motivated by greed, status and sometimes by pure curiosity alone but this is rarely the whole story of those who make the significant discoveries. To look at it another way, as said earlier, it is apparent that all disciplines are dependent on each other. How could it be otherwise since global human culture represents an integrated whole? Any attempt to compartmentalise knowledge entirely must inevitably end with error and confusion.

Marx may well have rejected the label 'Marxism' for the reasons outlined above. It seemed absurd to him that the interdisciplinary study of human development should be compartmentalised into a sectarian ideology bearing his name. We only use the phrase today to emphasise the contrast it represents to contemporary approaches in the study of politics. It is one of the great ironies of history that through the political ignorance of many of those who have proclaimed his name during moments of political turmoil it has become identified with absolutism and dogmatic reductionism.

WEZ

Return to hell

We the 99 percent suffer worldwide, but in some areas more than others. Haiti could reasonably be described as hell on Earth. 2010's earthquake and tsunami killed more than 160,000 and displaced up to 1.5 million people. More recently, the UN-caused cholera outbreak killed thousands and hospitalised hundreds of thousands. During this time hundreds of women and underage girls traded themselves for food and medicine. The Red Cross avoided killing anyone but after raising half a billion dollars built just six homes - about as effective as using a Band Aid on a tumour. Last month, over 900 lives were lost when a hurricane struck. So why is Haiti so prone to such disasters, UNnatural or otherwise? 'More than half of Haiti's city-dwellers live in overcrowded shantytowns that take the full force of any earthquake, hurricane, or disease outbreak... Massive deforestation has also led to soil erosion, leaving hillside huts and poorly-built houses in the capital, Port-au-Prince, dangerously exposed. In rural areas, topsoil used for agriculture is often washed away. Political instability and corruption have been a factor. Without effective government for decades, Haiti currently ranks 163rd out of the 188 countries on the UN Human Development Index. It spends little on storm defences' (bbc.com, 7 October).

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'An Egyptian MP has called for women to be forced to undergo virginity tests before being admitted to university, it has been reported. Parliamentary member Elhamy Agina called on the Minister of Higher Education to issue a mandate requiring him or his officials to enforce the virginity tests, Egyptian Streets reports. He has suggested that university cards could only be issued to female students on completion of a virginity test. In an interview with local media, he said: "Any girl who enters university, we have to check her medical examination to prove that she is a Miss. Therefore, each girl must present an official document upon being admitted to university stating she's a Miss." The term "Miss" in Egyptian culture is often used to refer euphemistically to whether a woman is a virgin' (theindependent.co.uk, 1 October). In a socialist world, education will replace schooling and have nothing to do with whether one is a virgin, can pay, possess a certain skin colour or caste origin. Such ideas will be thrown into the dustbin of history, along with degrees in conflict studies, economics, homeopathy, political geography, theology, etc.

Breaking down the profit system

'In his 93 years, Bob Wallace has seen some product-pricing doozies over the decades, but the nonstop national furore over the stratospheric price hikes for EpiPens — now retailing above \$700 for a two-pack — was the final shot... So in time-honored Silicon Valley tradition — and piqued by the EpiPen-maker Mylan's corporate tagline Seeing Is Believing — Wallace and Roland Krevitt, a veteran Scotts Valley manufacturing and tooling consultant, set out to demystify the cost to produce the EpiPen, piece by piece. The auto-injector delivers a lifesaving dose of adrenaline to treat serious allergic reactions to everything from bee stings to food. Hunched over his vintage Shopsmith table saw in his garage, Wallace sliced open the plastic injector to begin reverse-engineering the device. Then it was Krevitt's turn to break out his gram scale and caliper to crunch the costs for molding and manufacturing the nozzle, needle, syringe, springs, safety cap — and 0.3 mg of epinephrine. Their startling estimate of the cost for a two-pack of EpiPens: \$8.02 ' (mercurynews.com, 1 October).

Sick of the System

Whether or not life-saving drugs are made is first a question of profit. Their use is not determined by need, as Dr Francisco Olea-Popelka, from the Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, confirmed recently. He said zoonotic tuberculosis is far more common than previously recognised, with over 120,000 new cases of animal TB each year. The figure is dwarfed by tuberculosis and HIV, with each accounting for between 1.1 million and 1.2 million unnecessary deaths in 2014. But Dr Olea-Popelka thinks we should care, adding 'this is a well-known problem and has been neglected for decades, it is a disease that is preventable, treatable and curable and yet still today we have hundreds of thousands of people suffering from it' (bbc.com, 1 October).



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